(c) if so, the steps Government are taking to relex loan norms for these activities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reported that traditional / non-traditional plantations and horticulture as also medium and long term loans to all plantations / horticulture have already been included in Priority Sector and have been classified as Direct Finance to Agriculture. Loans given by banks to food & agro-processing sector are also included under priority sector lending and achievements are being monitored regularly by RBI.

(b) and (c) RBI has reported that a new educational loan scheme prepared by the Indian Banks Association (IBA) duly approved by the Government has been circulated among all scheduled commercial banks for implementation during this academic session itself. The salient features of the scheme are:

- Cover courses in schools and colleges in India and abroad;
- Loans up to Rs. 7.5 lakhs for studies in India and up to Rs. 15 lakhs for studies abroad;
- No collateral or margin required for loans up to Rs. 4 lakhs;
- Interest on loans up to Rs.4 lakh will not exceed PLR and those above Rs. 4 lakhs will be PLR+1 percent;
- Repayable over a period of 5-7 years after completion of the course.

The New Education Loan Scheme has been introduced by all the public sector banks. One of the objectives of the new scheme is that the promising students are not deprived of education because of lack of funds.

Disposal of Income Tax cases by settlement Commissioner

1566. SHRIMATI SARLA MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the percentage of income tax and wealth tax cases disposed by Settlement Commissioner during the year 1999-2000 had decreased to 21.18 per cent and 22.05 per cent from 32.30 per cent and 34.97 per cent respectively in comparision to -1998-99;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) what concrete steps Government propose to take in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI GINGEE N. RAMACHANDRAN): (a) Yes, sir.

(b) The reasons are *inter alia* delayed reports from the field formations of the Income-tax Department and requests for adjournment of cases fixed for hearing by the applicants as well as the Department.

(c) The Commission has taken following steps for settlement of cases:

(i) holding meetings with the concerned Chief Commissioner of Income-tax to expedite the Reports.

(ii) Camping by Benches of the Commission at different stations; and

(iii) Reallocating the work among the four Benches of the Commission to increase disposal.

Seeking Special Grant by Railways

1567. SHRI K.M. SAIFULLAH Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Railways have sought special grant from Government to accelerate work on select projects;

(b) if so, the projects proposed to be covered by the special grants; and

(c) the action taken to sanction additional funds to complete the pending projects in Public Interest?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) Yes, Sir;

(b) and (c) Additional budget support of Rs. 1898 crore for (i) replacement and renewal of over-aged assets of Railways as a part of their effort to strengthen Railway Safety (Rs. 1000 crore) and (ii) accelerated progress of select projects (Rs. 898 crore) has been agreed to. Ministry of Railways will accordingly obtain the approval of the Parliament through Supplementary Demands for Grants in the current session.

Subsidiaries of ICICI

1568. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of subsidiaries of ICICI at present;